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SUBJECT: Rolling Power Cuts Add to Heightened Tensions in Cote d'Ivoire

¶1. (SBU) Summary: On February 2, due to the breakdown of a large generation station, the GOCI began implementing rolling power cuts throughout the country, a situation the government predicts will last until mid-May. The GOCI is giving priority to factories, hospitals and water pumping stations. While Abidjan has yet to be significantly affected, northern areas have reported 24 hour stretches without power or water. These widespread outages - the first in 15 years - are emblematic of the country's deteriorating infrastructure, and, combined with an increase in fuel prices, are likely to further strain an already tense political environment. This is particularly true in the north, where residents feel they have been singled out to receive the brunt of the cuts. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Simon Eddy, director general of electricity at the Ministry of Mines and Energy told pol/econ chief that the country was currently producing 800 MW (although it has an installed capacity of 1210 MW), while experiencing demand of 850MW. Although a new 110 MW power station had come on line in December, the recent breakdown of the 150 MW Azito station had caused a net decline of 40 MW, which is the cause of the current shortage. He expects that French company Alstom, the plant's operator, will have repaired the power plant by mid-March, but there were other plants that needed to be taken off line for emergency maintenance, so he did not expect full service to be restored until mid-May.

¶3. (SBU) Eddy said that priority would be given to industrial facilities, hospitals, and water pumping stations. Eddy said that power cuts should not average more than eight hours daily, noting that Abidjan had yet to be severely affected by the shortages. He admitted that some areas in the north have been subject to cuts of 16 hours daily, but said that since no one in the former rebel zones pays their bills, it is to be expected that they would receive less power. According to anecdotal accounts, cuts in the north have been severe, and have been coupled with lack of water when the current to the pumps was cut. For example, in Seguele on February 3 there was no electricity after 7:30 a.m., and no electricity at all on February 4. In Man, on February 1, there was no power or water between 1:00 a.m. and 10:00 a.m.

¶4. (SBU) The current cutbacks are the first major ones since 1994, according to local residents. Ironically, Cote d'Ivoire is considered the region's most reliable supplier of power, with 50 percent of the population having access to electricity (compared with 30 percent in Senegal and less than 10 percent in Liberia). The GOCI will continue to export power to the region (Burkina Faso, Benin, and Togo), however, but only the minimum amount required under its contractual obligations. Eddy said that currently Ghana is providing Cdi with 50 MW of power.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: The current power supply problems come at a difficult time for the country. Gasoline and diesel prices have recently been raised and the election impasse of the past three weeks (reftels) has occasioned outbreaks of violence in the north. Many northerners perceive that they are bearing an unequal burden of the scheduled cuts, and this might contribute to heightened

unrest. The situation highlights the fragile state of the country's electrical infrastructure after almost a decade of no maintenance. Transmission lines are completely saturated, and transmission and distribution losses are close to 24 percent. While demand is growing at 5-6 percent annually, installed capacity has increased by only 32 percent from 1990-2008. This is just one more reason that the political and economic stalemate caused by the current political crisis needs to come to end soon.

STANLEY